

Asia Harvest



Swing the Sickle for the Harvest is Ripe! (Joel 3:13)

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Bibles for Vietnam
- A Window of Opportunity -

From the Front Lines

with Paul Hattaway

***“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”
(Proverbs 3:5-6)***

This issue of our Asia Harvest newsletter is about Vietnam, and the need for Bibles among the many ethnic tribes there. Recently I remembered back to my first trip to Vietnam 17 years ago. The country was drastically different to how it is now. Back then it was still trying to shake off the effects of the Vietnam War. There were very few vehicles on the streets apart from police cars and army trucks, and foreigners were closely watched and followed wherever they went.

I believed that God wanted me to carry Bibles into Vietnam and the neighboring country of Laos. An organization in Bangkok, Thailand, provided Bibles for free to Christians who were willing to carry them into these nations, and I looked forward to loading up with as many as I could before leaving for Ho Chi Minh City (formerly known as Saigon). I had just one problem. Apart from my ticket I had absolutely no money for any other expenses such as food and accommodation. These costs were estimated to be just US\$75, but after much prayer I boarded my flight to Bangkok still with no money at all for the additional expenses. I tried to hide my worry, but had little option but to trust that God would do something.

My Singapore Airlines flight arrived in Bangkok and I waited for my bag to appear on the conveyer belt. After a while all the other passengers had collected their belongings and left the customs area, and the conveyer belt was turned off. My bag had been lost by the airline!

Now I was really worried. I could hardly believe that things had become even worse. I went to the airline counter and filled out a form for my lost bag. They apologized and said they would bring it to the place I was staying as soon as it turned up. Dirty and tired from the flight, I left the airport wondering if I had heard from God correctly that I was to carry Bibles to the believers in Vietnam.

The next morning there was a knock at my door. An airport employee was standing there with my bag! He again apologized and asked me to sign a receipt as he handed me an envelope, explaining that it was Singapore Airlines policy to

compensate passengers whose luggage had been misplaced. I sat down on my bed and opened the envelope to find US\$75 cash, exactly what I needed to go to Vietnam!

By the grace of God I successfully delivered more than 100 Vietnamese Bibles on that journey, and I met with some of the key house church leaders. In those days they received very few visitors from overseas and we had a wonderful time of fellowship.



One of the church leaders told me he slept with a packed bag next to his bed every night, so that if the police came to take him off to prison he would have some essential supplies to take with him.

Just a few weeks later I received news that the pastor had indeed been arrested and sentenced to several years in prison, along with several other key Vietnamese house church leaders. Such commitment touched my heart and challenged me to live more wholeheartedly for the Lord Jesus Christ. The \$75 provision had also taught me a valuable lesson about trusting God! He is always in charge, even if He has to orchestrate getting your bags lost to show it!

The years have passed since that first trip. We have been privileged to travel back to Vietnam on many occasions, and have seen

the Church grow despite many setbacks and much persecution from the Communist government. House churches movements which had hundreds of believers now have tens of thousands, and the Name of Jesus has been proclaimed in thousands of villages and communities.

Last year we launched our “Southeast Asia Bible Fund” which helps print and deliver Bibles in tribal languages throughout Vietnam and other SE Asian nations. At the time we didn’t know that a tremendous, strategic opportunity would present itself in Vietnam.

This newsletter is about that opportunity. We hope you will read about it and prayerfully consider how you, your family, or your church group might be involved in blessing our brothers and sisters in Vietnam who have been without God’s Word for so long.

Bibles for Vietnam - A Strategic Opportunity to Help Make a Difference



Vietnam has changed enormously over the last 10 years. The economy is booming, and the major cities are full of glittering lights, five-star hotels, and towering apartment blocks. In the countryside, however, change has been much slower and millions of people still struggle to eke out a living, earning just a few dollars a day.

Vietnam is home to more than 100 distinct tribes and people groups (although the government officially recognizes just 54 of them). These groups range in size from more than one million people down to tiny groups with just a few hundred individuals trying to hold on to their culture and language.

North Vietnam became Communist in 1954, but the South of the country held out against Communism until the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. The whole country remains Communist to the present day.

In the years preceding the Communist takeover of South Vietnam in 1975, many missionaries worked among the numerous tribal groups in the south. They translated the Bible, or at least the New Testament, into more than a dozen tribal languages during this time. In 1975 all missionaries were expelled from the country and Vietnam was effectively shut off to the outside world for years to come.

Recently we spoke with a veteran missionary who visited South Vietnam in 1968 and stayed in a guest house operated by Bible translators. He

recalled their courage and devotion to the Lord:

In 1968 I was first asked to go to Vietnam to help solve the missionaries' printing needs. I was met at Saigon airport by missionaries from the Summer Institute of Linguistics. We immediately bonded together. They were the bravest and most dedicated disciples I had ever met. While the fighting between the North Vietnamese and the Americans was at its worst, SIL missionaries boldly continued their work of translating the Word of God for the many tribal groups living in the jungles.

Each morning before breakfast I joined all the missionaries in a Bible study and prayer meeting. I loved the fellowship with these dear brothers and sisters who were willing to give up everything so that the tribes would have the Scriptures in their languages. I learned that all the printing shops in Saigon had been closed because of the war, so the missionaries needed help from the outside. At first I didn't realize the cost these brave warriors had paid. On later trips to Saigon I learned that many of my new friends had lost their wives or their husbands during Viet-Cong ambushes.

A m a z i n g l y, God's grace and joy had given them

strength to stand tall through all the suffering, hurt and pain.

On Sunday morning we drove 25 miles to where more than 1,500 tribal Christians were waiting for our arrival. I was introduced to the pastor, a precious saint who had lost his eyes after being tortured by the Viet-Cong. The missionaries later told me the blind pastor had led over 1,700 people to Jesus Christ, and had baptized most of them right in the midst of the war.

His example of true consecration gave me much strength in the later years of my ministry.

After Vietnam slowly started to reopen in the late 1980s and early 1990s it was found the tribal Christians still followed the Lord Jesus in large numbers, despite years of persecution and hardship. Their



A load of Bibles ready for distribution

biggest need then, and today, is for Bibles. For years it was illegal to print the Word of God inside Vietnam, so the only Bibles the believers could obtain in their native language came on the rare occasions that foreign Christians would visit Vietnam and carry Bibles with them.

Starting in the late 1990s, Asia Harvest helped print and deliver more than 20,000 Bibles to Vietnam. These were warmly received and helped many churches grow in faith and in number. Now, a far greater opportunity has arisen to get tens of thousands of Bibles into the hands of tribal believers in Vietnam, totally legally.

Our main contact who leads this work has many years experience in Vietnam.

He recently wrote the following letter, outlining these exciting developments:

I've recently returned from a trip to Vietnam, and I've learned that there is currently an almost unbelievable window of opportunity to supply Vietnam's tribal Christians with the Word of God. We need your prayers and support if this is to become a reality to help many people receive their very first copy of God's Word.

Things are changing in Vietnam. The most probable reason for this is that Vietnam is seeking entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) and would like to slowly open its markets to the world economy. As a result of this, and Vietnam's desire for a closer relationship with



Boxes of Bibles being carried through the jungle to Christians in a remote village.



A group of tribal Christians listening intently to the preaching of God's Word.

America, the government is starting to allow some religious freedoms in the cities. So what has happened is that the city governments have started to give permission for tribal Bibles to be printed. This is amazing, because up until last year even using the tribal scripts was outlawed. Amazingly, we can now print these Bibles legally in Vietnam.

The timing couldn't be better, because a number of tribal Bible translations or revisions have been recently completed and more are being finished as I write. It just seems like God's timing that this would happen all at once.

We have a sense of urgency as we don't know how long this window of opportunity will remain open. China went through these same motions when they applied to the

WTO. They decreased their attacks on the church when they were applying, but once their application was granted at the end of 2001, the government recommenced its persecution against the Body of Christ. Vietnam often follows China's lead, so we don't know what will happen once Vietnam finally achieves WTO membership.

I am writing at this time to let you know of this opportunity, and what is needed to see this come to pass. Time may be short, but if we act together, tens of thousands of Scriptures can be printed for Vietnam's poorest and most persecuted believers.

There are 8 Bible translations ready for printing right now! The church leaders are praying that their flocks might be fed by the Word of God they so desperately crave.

We are excited about this great opportunity. Would you please prayerfully consider helping through prayer and/or financial support? Perhaps your church can assist in these printing projects.

Thank you and God bless you.

Below we outline the various printing projects that we would like to complete for the tribal Christians of Vietnam and neighboring countries. We include some basic data about each tribe, and the number of Bibles we want to print as soon as possible:



Tribe: STIENG
Countries: Vietnam, Cambodia
Population: 64,000
Christians: 31,000
 Portions of the Stieng Bible were first translated in 1971. Now the entire New Testament is available but few Stieng Christians have a copy. With God's help we plan to print and deliver **5,000 Stieng New Testaments.**

Tribe: JEH
Countries: Vietnam, Laos
Population: 46,000
Christians: 15,000
 Portions of the Jeh Bible were first translated in 1967. The entire New Testament is now available but few Jeh Christians have ever had owned a copy. Our plan is to print and deliver **5,000 Jeh New Testaments.**



Tribe: KOHO
Country: Vietnam
Population: 142,000
Christians: 60,000
 The Koho New Testament was first translated in 1967. They are one of the strongest Christian tribes in Vietnam, with approximately 60,000 believers. Please pray as we seek to print and deliver **5,000 Koho New Testaments.**



Tribe: MNONG
Countries: Vietnam, Cambodia
Population: 98,000
Christians: 48,000
 The Mnong Scriptures were first translated in 1977, but are scarce. By God's grace we plan to print and deliver **5,000 Mnong New Testaments.**





Tribe: **BAHNAR**
 Country: Vietnam
 Population: **174,000**
 Christians: **25,000**
 Portions of the Bahnar Bible were first translated by missionaries back in 1952, but the whole New Testament was not

completed until 1977. Please pray we will be able to print and deliver **5,000 Bahnar New Testaments (with Psalms)**.

Tribe: **HRE**
 Country: Vietnam
 Population: **124,000**
 Christians: **13,000**
 The Hre Scriptures were first translated by faithful missionaries in 1967. With God's enabling power we plan to print and

deliver **5,000 Hre New Testaments** to the hungry believers.



Tribe: **BRU**
 Countries: Laos, Vietnam
 Population: **137,000**
 Christians: **14,000**
 The Bru Scriptures were first translated in 1968, and the New Testament in 1981.

Our plan is to print and deliver **5,000 Bru New Testaments (with Psalms)**, to Christians in both Vietnam and Laos.

Tribe: **CHORO**
 Population: **22,000**
 Christians: **10,000**
 Portions of the Choro Scriptures were first translated in 1966, and the New Testament was completed in 1982.

With God's help we plan to print and deliver **5,000 Choro New Testaments** to our needy brothers and sisters.



THE SOUTHEAST ASIA BIBLE FUND

Please pray for this strategic opportunity, and consider if you or your church group are able to participate. The cost of printing the Bibles varies from language to language, but we have estimated an average cost per Bible of \$2.70, including printing and delivery. All Bibles are distributed free of charge to the tribal Christians. To help, please fill in the yellow Response form in this newsletter and send your check/cheque to the Asia Harvest office nearest you. Alternatively, you can make an easy and secure credit card donation to this or any of our projects at our website: www.asiaharvest.org